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or Rendered Blind in Last Few  
Years by Its Use in Flavor-  
ings, Witch Hazel, Etc.

New York, Nov. 28.—Long before the recent deaths caused by adulterated whiskey in the Stryker's Farm district in this city the medical profession realized the dangers that threatened the public from the substitution of wood alcohol for grain alcohol. One grave peril lies in the fact that wood alcohol is sometimes used instead of grain alcohol in various household preparations.

The use of wood alcohol in the manufacture and adulteration of potable spirits is sufficiently alarming, but this is by no means the extent of its use as an adulterant. Not only have preparations intended for use in the arts, as varnishes, or for external use, as witch hazel, been made with wood alcohol as an ingredient, but even medicinal or flavoring agents, such as essence of Jamaica ginger, lemon, peppermint, &c., intended for internal use have been found to contain it.

Eye specialists of this country and of Europe agree in ascribing many cases of total or partial blindness to wood alcohol, which had unknowingly been taken in the form of liquors, medicinal remedies, flavoring essences or used externally in the form of witch hazel and bay rum and as liniments and for alcohol rubs.

Wood alcohol is known to the chemist as carbonyl and methyl, more popularly known under the name of pyroigneous spirit, pyroxylic spirit, wood alcohol and wood naphtha. It occurs as one of the ingredients of crude wood vinegar, the fluid product of the destructive distillation of wood.

Purified wood alcohol is a thin, colorless fluid, greatly resembling grain alcohol in taste and smell, but obtained from wood vinegar. Unpurified, it has a rank and offensive odor and flavor. It is only within the past seven or eight years that cheap, deodorized wood alcohol has been placed on the market, and it is only during the same period that the alarming record of death and blindness resulting from its use has been made.

Before that time the unpurified product possessed so offensive an odor and taste that even the most inveterate drunkard was unable to stomach it. The purified wood alcohol is known under various names, and owing to the fact of its close similarity in taste and smell to grain alcohol, and to its comparative cheapness—wood alcohol untaxed retails at 50 cents a gallon, grain alcohol taxed retails at \$2.50—it is very largely substituted for grain alcohol.

Unhappy the deodorizing process destroys none of the poisonous properties of wood alcohol, and, while differing little in appearance, taste and smell from grain alcohol, it is under certain conditions a deadly poison.

Poisoning by wood alcohol manifests itself in two forms—that of acute poisoning and that of chronic poisoning. According to researches by physiologists, Jeffroy and Serreux, Birch-Hirschfeld, Holden Hunt, Pohl and others the symptoms of the acute form are in general similar to those observed in cases of poisoning by grain alcohol excepting that the action of wood alcohol is produced more slowly and the duration of the intoxication is more prolonged. The coma caused by wood alcohol continues for a very much longer time than does that caused by grain alcohol.

The investigations of Buller and Wood have demonstrated that, in many instances no marked poisonous symptoms are noticed until twenty-four hours, or longer, after the last number of doses, usually small drinks, had been taken. Indeed, it may be set down as a rule that except in persons exhibiting an idiosyncrasy against wood alcohol or unless a large dose of the poison be drunk within a few hours, not only may the severe abdominal symptoms and the collapse of the heart and nervous system be postponed, but even the fatal termination has in some instances been delayed for several days.

Although physiological experiments would seem to show that the consumption of wood alcohol in large quantities has a similar effect on animal life to that of grain alcohol when taken in excess, yet it is gathered from the observations by doctors of those suffering from the acute form of wood alcohol poisoning that wood alcohol is undoubtedly, in every respect and how- ever taken, far more dangerous to man than grain alcohol.

Chronic or sub-acute poisoning by wood alcohol, that is, the taking of small quantities at short intervals, produces a form of cumulative action, depending probably on the retention within the body of wood alcohol or of some of its decomposition products.

Pohl made the important discovery that wood alcohol differs markedly from grain alcohol in that it is but partially oxidized in the body and that its admittance leads to the formation within the body of a markedly poisonous acid, formic acid, which is thrown out of the system very slowly, a striking illustration of the fact that within the body one poison may be converted into another which is far more powerful.

Dr. Frank Buller of Montreal and Dr. Casey Wood of Chicago, both of whom are eye specialists, began an investigation of the subject in the early part of this year, and the results are now being published in the Journal of the American Medical Association. The physicians in question have laid bare by their researches a startling state of affairs.

It has been found that wood alcohol, adulterated essences and witch hazel, as well as other preparations containing wood alcohol, have been directly responsible during the past seven or eight years for about 175 cases of blindness and about 10 cases of death. Inasmuch as the investigations have been necessarily incomplete (Dr. Buller not having attempted to collect published instances of death, and Dr. Wood having noted only cases unpublished in medical journals), it is in a high degree likely that a more thorough and extended search would show that quite 200 persons have been killed and the same number blinded by preparations containing wood alcohol within a comparatively short period.



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